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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE AND EUR/AGS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GM](#) [FR](#) [NATO](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: EU CONSTITUTION DOMINATES AGENDA OF FRANCO-GERMAN
MINISTERIAL IN PARIS

REF: A. A) PARIS 2825

[B](#). B) PARIS 2746

[C](#). C) PARIS 2663

[D](#). D) PARIS 2604

[E](#). E) PARIS 2516

Classified By: Acting DCM Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: President Chirac and Chancellor Schroeder used the fifth meeting of the Council of Franco-German ministers to support Chirac's efforts to highlight the benefits of the EU to a skeptical French public in the run-up to the French May 29 referendum on the draft EU constitutional treaty (reftels). While the substance of the meeting was supposed to focus on technological and industrial cooperation, discussion of the constitutional treaty received the preponderance of attention in prepared public remarks and during questions at the joint press appearance. Chirac emphasized in remarks in the press conference and at the Sorbonne later in the day that France would miss an historic opportunity if its citizens voted no on the constitutional treaty: "If we vote 'no,'" he said, "we also take the responsibility for weakening France and its capacity to defend its interests and its value in Europe and the world of tomorrow." On security and defense issues, France and Germany discussed the situation in Darfur with France expressing a preference for an EU mission (ESDP), assuming an appropriate AU request for assistance. END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (C) Almost 30 ministers accompanied Chirac and Schroeder to the meetings, which were formally dedicated to joint projects in industrial innovation. The co-presidents of a joint working group on economic cooperation, created during a Franco-German summit last October, presented four projects for cooperation (two in technology and two in health), which the Council accepted. Most attention however, was given to Chirac's and Schroeder's efforts to boost the French government's campaign to persuade voters to vote "yes" on the constitutional treaty in the May 29th referendum. Early in the afternoon, the two leaders gave a joint press conference at the Elysee Palace, where, after dispensing with remarks on the industrial cooperation front, they quickly turned to the constitution. Chirac emphasized to his audience that the constitution was largely inspired by French ideas and would support the "social model" dear to the French public. The constitutional treaty, he said, will permit France to be stronger in Europe, and Europe, stronger in the world.

[3](#). (C) In both his press conference and Sorbonne remarks, Chirac characterized the constitutional treaty as directly related to the French Revolution, in one instance calling it the "daughter" of 1789. He emphasized in both instances that the relative weight of France and Germany within the Council will increase under the treaty's rules, allowing them to influence European decision-making.

[4](#). (C) In neither remarks did Chirac single out the United States as a rival center of power that calls for counterbalancing by a more united Europe or as a country against which the treaty was directed. He did say in his press conference remarks that "to vote yes is also to permit Europe to weigh more in the world to defend its interests, but also its values, . . . which is not evident in a world that evolves like we see it evolving, with the emergence of big poles of an international size like China, India, tomorrow Brazil and Latin America, like Russia, like the United States." Towards the end of his prepared remarks at the press conference, Chirac noted:

-- "So, May 29th. . . the choice will be simple: if we vote "no," we take the responsibility to interrupt 50 years of European construction, 50 years of the path toward peace, democracy, unanimously respected and assured and guaranteed at the level of the totality of our continent. And we rest in the current situation that everyone recognizes as unsatisfactory. We also leave, make no mistake about it, the field free to the partisans of a liberal evolution for Europe.

-- "If we vote "no," we also take the responsibility for weakening France and its capacity to defend its interests and

its value in Europe and in the world of tomorrow."

15. (C) Schroder took up the pro-EU banner as well, noting that Chirac had clearly stated what was at stake. France and Germany, he said, have a very particular responsibility in the success of the constitutional treaty and the European project because of the lessons they had drawn from history. If the treaty is not ratified by all the European states, he said, it will weaken Europe. "The voice of Europe in the world club will not make itself be heard more, but much less, its voice will be weakened," he said. The Chancellor noted that he remains confident that the 'yes' will win in France. What's in play, he said, "is the possibility for our two countries to make Europe progress, to press on what is common to us."

16. (C) In his address at the Sorbonne, again, ostensibly to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Franco-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Chirac devoted a few paragraphs to the question of industrial cooperation before turning to the question of the constitutional treaty. Like Schroeder, he harkened back to the lessons learned from the "murderous conflicts" that long rent Europe. "We learned from that the value of peace," he said, "the peace that the constitutional treaty consolidates in tying together our countries by new clauses of security and mutual assistance. . . in permitting us to go further in the defense of Europe." Thanks to the constitutional treaty, Chirac noted, there would be no backtracking possible regarding human rights. It would make the Europeans "cross a historic step." "We need this constitution, he said, " because we want to build a Europe based on values and not only on a market. We need it because it affirms the European model." He repeated a remark he had made in the press conference -- which Schroeder had seconded -- that he would not have signed the treaty if it had not delivered on these fronts.

17. (C) Chirac closed his remarks by noting the unity of France and Germany on the issue, but preceded that by reminding listeners that French and German weight would increase on the council under treaty rules, and then laid on more negative imagery: "If Europe doesn't organize itself now," he said, "the world won't wait for us. If Europe renounces its political and social ambition, the ultra-liberal model will have the field free. And if France breaks the dynamic of the Union and puts itself in the gap, it will be less listened to, less followed, less strong when it has to defend its interests and values."

18. (C) According to Florian Escudie, MFA desk officer following security issues, and the German Political Counselor, who sat in on some of the meetings, the two sides also discussed defense and security concerns. They reviewed progress made to date on ESDP, including on the EU planning cell, standing up a FR-GR Battlegroup (with UK, Belgium, and Luxembourg) by 2008, and the status of the European Defense Agency. Chirac and Schroeder expressed satisfaction with the way the Franco-German battalion had performed at ISAF.

19. (C) In response to our queries, German Political Counselor Benedikt Haller (protect) confirmed that discussions on Darfur took place. The French reportedly pushed for an EU mission -- in preference to a NATO mission -- assuming the AU eventually makes a request for assistance. Haller noted that that the French preference was linked to the constitutional campaign, saying that the French had explained that the Elysee would like to point to a concrete and positive EU effort to demonstrate to voters the benefits of the EU. Haller did not provide the German reaction to this proposal, but said Germany likely would follow its "traditional instincts," implying that Berlin would seek a compromise position.

110. (C) Jean-Pierre Dubois, the head of the French MFA's Franco-German unit underlined to us the emphasis on the constitution during the day's events. "It will be a little while before we know" if Chirac's and Schroeder's remarks were successful in moving public opinion, he said, referring to the never-ending polling on the constitutional question here. The MFA was clearly pleased with the press coverage of the events, which presented the public with several examples of what he called Chirac's "well-argued" points in favor of the constitution. If upcoming polls should reflect movement in public opinion towards more support for the proposed constitution, Chirac will take credit for that even though a complex range of factors are shaping the opinion of an uneasy and volatile electorate. Dubois also drew our attention to the cooperation agreements signed during the day, which will enhance student and teacher exchanges, and aid researchers' mobility, among other things. He noted that all four projects that the co-presidents of the working group had presented had been approved.

111. (C) AFP interviewed Jean-Marie LePen, head of the extreme right-wing National Front party, who said Chirac and Schroeder reminded him of the "blind and the crippled," and

said the two had no hope of changing public opinion. LePen himself admitted he had so far taken a back seat in the 'no' campaign so as not to turn off possible voters. "We're going to kick off on May 1 at the Opera," he said, "because I believe that will be the biggest meeting of the 'no' camp of the entire campaign."

WOLFF